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SUBJECT: WHO'S WHO IN MARSHLAND RESTORATION (PART 2 OF 2)

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (SBU) Marsh restoration is a nexus of delicate political, economic, and cultural issues, spanning three provinces and 12 Iraqi ministries. While only a few tens of thousands of Iraqis still lived in the marshes area in early 2003, estimates are that over 150,000 people have returned, with many more willing to come back if additional services such as schools and hospitals were available. Within the Government of Iraq (GOI), primary responsibility to formulate policy and execute marsh water management projects rests with the Ministry of Water Resources Center for the Restoration of the Iraqi Marshes. By far the most active international partners in restoration efforts are the Italian Ministry of Environment and Territories and an Iraqi nongovernmental organization, Nature Iraq. USG support to Iraq's marsh restoration efforts has thus far lacked adequate coordination, with no clear overarching policy direction. Embassy believes that the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD--lead agency for Everglades restoration) can make a unique contribution to Iraq's efforts, based on the Iraqi marshland's striking resemblance to the experience of the Florida Everglades. A small technically-focused capacity building relationship with the SFWMD could be an inexpensive way to provide highly symbolic, yet valuable and effective, support to Iraq's marsh restoration efforts. This cable is part two in a two-part series on the Iraqi marshes. End summary.

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Government of Iraq Entities  
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¶2. (SBU) While numerous ministries are playing a role in GOI efforts to restore the marshes, primary responsibility to formulate policy and execute marsh water management projects rests with the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR) Center for the Restoration of the Iraqi Marshes (CRIM). Established in 2003, CRIM is presently led by Director General (DG) Abdul Kadhem Lahmood, an engineer who has been with MoWR for over 28 years, including under Saddam when the ministry was known as the Ministry of Irrigation. (Note: Kadhem is an experienced and capable technocrat who has also served as DG of three other MoWR Directorates since 2003; his nomination to his current post gives some sense of the importance the Ministry places on marsh issues. End note.) The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research conducts marsh research at several universities, most notably, the Marsh Research Center in Dhi Qar University. The Ministry of Environment is supposed to play a monitoring role (measuring water volume, flow, and quality) as well as managing wildlife. However, it is yet to actively engage in these responsibilities. In the Council of Representatives, the Committee on Agriculture, Water, and Marshes oversees wetlands issues. Although there is a Minister of State for Marshes, Hassan Al-Sari, the position is largely an honorary one.

13. (SBU) CRIM DG Kadhem told EconOffs on March 18 that while some media reports claim CRIM is an inter-ministerial body, it is in fact only a MoWR entity. He also noted that there is a draft law pending before the Council of Ministers to constitute an inter-ministerial "Marsh Construction Committee" to coordinate overall marsh policy and execution. The committee would be led by Minister of State for Marshes Hassan Al-Sari, would include 12 ministries, and would have QHassan Al-Sari, would include 12 ministries, and would have an independent budget and mandate to address housinQpI%M%=9Qfor the future of the marshes, and continues to work closely with IMET and the Italian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Dhi Qar to implement its marsh plans. IMET funded NI to perform a feasibility study of the marsh region, including designs for an integrated system of gates and regulators to control water flow into the marshes which now forms the nucleus of GOI marsh restoration plans. Most recently, IMET funded 25 water monitoring stations in the marsh region, 12 of which have been installed. NI and the Government of Italy are also actively working to establish Iraq's first national park, called the Mesopotamian Marshlands National Park, a 1400 square-kilometer region to support scientific research, cultural awareness (including a museum), and restoration of biodiversity. Alwash told EmbOff that the hurdles to these efforts lay mostly within the structural disconnect between the government in Baghdad and the three provincial governments in whose jurisdiction the marshes lie.

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U.S. Assistance Programs  
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16. (SBU) The USG has also contributed several key components to marsh restoration efforts. CRIM and Nature Iraq depended heavily on the 2004-2006 USAID-funded USD 4 million Iraq Marshlands Restoration Program, part of the Agriculture Reconstruction and Development Program for Iraq (ARDI), as the foundation for their current restoration plans. USAID support for this activity ended with completion of the ARDI Project in 2006. Since 2006, however, USG programs related to the marshes have been limited and not fully coordinated. The Iraq Transition Assistance Office (ITAO) has funded numerous major water resource management projects throughout Iraq, many of which, directly or indirectly, affect the flow of water in the marsh region. This includes a U.S Army Corps of Engineers hydrologic computer model of the Tigris-Euphrates river basin, together with a special module to model water flow in the marshes which the MoWR has used to help define Iraq's marsh restoration goals. Multi-National Force-Iraq as well as the Regional Embassy Office (REO) in Basrah and the Dhi Qar and Maysan Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have also undertaken numerous projects in the marsh region, most of them relatively small and focused on economic recovery.

17. (SBU) REO Basrah helped arrange an Iraqi-led marshlands conference in Basrah in January, 2009, focused on integrating provincial and national marsh restoration efforts, with particular emphasis on economic development. With thin participation from the national level, however, conference results appeared to underscore rather than bridge the national-provincial divide. (Note: Provincial attendee's frustration with what they perceived to be a lack of national-level interest oddly did not equally extend to Qnational-level interest oddly did not equally extend to Basrah Governorate's clear lack of initiative in developing Basrah's own marsh areas. End note.)

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Marshlands Recovering, Residents Returning  
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18. (SBU) Iraqis living in the marsh region required no direction from local or federal authorities when, in spring 2003, they "voted with their hands," in the words of Alwash, and broke levees to re-flood small areas of the marshes. While only a few tens of thousands of Iraqis still lived in the areas immediately bordering the marshes at the time, NI estimates that over 150,000 people have returned, with many more willing to come back if additional services such as schools and hospitals were available. EmbOffs visited each of the 3 marshes in November 2008 and witnessed a robust marsh with hundreds of homes sprung up along road sides; herds of water buffalo grazing in deep marsh water; reed beds

over 12 feet tall; and abundant waterfowl, including predators feeding on small fish. Even marsh areas re-flooded

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assistance through imagery analysis under its Iraq Marshland Observation System (IMOS) program. (Note: UNEP's analysis is based on imagery provided through NASA's Rapid Response Project. End note.) The Canadian International Development Agency also sponsored a 2 million USD program in 2004-07, called the Canada-Iraq Marsh Initiative, to assist Iraq in developing a national-scale marsh management program.

¶5. (SBU) NI (run by Iraqi-born U.S. citizen Azzam Alwash) launched its "Eden Again" project in 2003 in hopes of creating a common vision for the future of the marshes, and continues to work closely with IMET and the Italian Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Dhi Qar to implement its marsh plans. IMET funded NI to perform a feasibility study of the marsh region, including designs for an integrated system of gates and regulators to control water flow into the marshes which now forms the nucleus of GOI marsh restoration plans. Most recently, IMET funded 25 water monitoring stations in the marsh region, 12 of which have been installed. NI and the Government of Italy are also actively working to establish Iraq's first national park, called the Mesopotamian Marshlands National Park, a 1400 square-kilometer region to support scientific research, cultural awareness (including a museum), and restoration of biodiversity. Alwash told EmbOff that the hurdles to these efforts lay mostly within the structural disconnect between the government in Baghdad and the three provincial governments in whose jurisdiction the marshes lie.

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as late as May 2007 appeared healthy, showing a remarkable ability to quickly rebound. Notably, the Hawizeh marsh, which has never been fully dried out, appeared healthy but showed no signs of human activity, present or past. CRIM DG Kadhemi said that this is due to the lack of services available in that region along the Iranian border.

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Next Steps: Florida Everglades / Iraq Marsh Cooperation  
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19. (SBU) Marsh restoration is a nexus of delicate political, economic, and cultural issues, spanning three provinces and 12 GOI ministries. With improving security, marsh issues are also receiving a burgeoning amount of press attention. USG support to Iraq's marsh restoration efforts has thus far lacked adequate coordination, with no clear overarching policy direction. We recommend that the Department promote an interagency effort to consider what contribution the USG could best make and how such assistance fits within the framework of overall USG engagement directly with Iraq and in the context of regional and global environmental policy. In this context, Embassy believes that the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD--lead agency for Everglades restoration) can make a unique contribution to Iraq's efforts, based on the Iraqi marshland's striking resemblance to the experience of the Florida Everglades. Like Iraq's marshlands, the Everglades was a sheet-flow wetlands system that a misdirected land reclamation scheme largely destroyed.

SFWMD works closely with the USACE in the Everglades, an organization with significant experience with Iraq's water management issues. A small technically-focused capacity building relationship with the SFWMD to assist the GOI with water quality management and biodiversity in wetlands recovery could be an inexpensive way to provide highly symbolic, yet valuable and effective, support to Iraq's marsh restoration efforts. Such modest U.S. support would emphasize the GOI's leadership on this issue, exemplified by CRIM's success thus far in building consensus and constructing a technically sound plan for marsh water management.

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